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THAN THE MALE
VAMPIRE!
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STARK TERROR

VOL. 1, NO. 3

APRIL 1971

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FRED HARRIS HAD TWO FAULTS IN THE EYES OF HIS WIFE, RITA -- ONE WAS THE LACK OF MONEY -- BUT MOST PEOPLE HAVE THAT FAULT, SO SHE COULDN'T BE TOO ANGRY AT THAT! IT WAS THE OTHER DEFECT THAT BOthered HER--HER HUSBAND WAS JUST TOO--

CLUMSY

WATCH OUT--OH MY NEW SWEATER--IT'S RUINED! AND IT COST SO MUCH MONEY!

OH, I'M SORRY, RITA-BABY! I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED--GUESS MY MIND WAS ON THAT NEW EXPERIMENT AT THE LAB!



THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I WONDER WHY I LOVE YOU-- YOU'RE SO-- SO CLUMSY!

BUT RITA--BUT DARLING! I JUST CAN'T HELP IT! GUESS I WAS BORN WITH TWO LEFT HANDS!

BUT RITA WAS A STRANGE GIRL-- AND COULD PUT UP WITH FRED'S CLUMSINESS--THE QUESTION OF MONEY--OR THE LACK OF IT WAS BEGINNING TO GET HER DOWN!

IT'S NO USE, I'VE HID THIS LONG ENOUGH. FRED--WHAT GOOD IS A MARRIAGE WITHOUT MONEY! THE SAYING TWO CAN LIVE AS CHEAPLY AS ONE, IS NONSENSE!

I KNOW A SCIENTIST DOESN'T MAKE MUCH--BUT WE'VE MANAGED TO GET ALONG!

MAYBE YOU CAN--BUT NOT ME! I'VE BEEN POOR ALL MY LIFE! IT'S TIME THAT CHANGED! WE'VE GOT TO HAVE MORE MONEY, FRED-- AND I'M BEGINNING TO THINK THAT I DON'T CARE HOW YOU GET IT!



RITA COULDN'T HELP BEING MONEY HUNGRY--SHE HAD ALWAYS BEEN A POOR GIRL --- THAT'S WHY SHE HAD ALWAYS WANTED THINGS-- THE THINGS SHE KNEW EXISTED BUT NEVER HAD! BUT THEN SHE FELL IN LOVE WITH FRED! SHE NEVER COULD FIGURE OUT WHY PEOPLE PLAN AND FIGURE -- THEN ALONG COMES SOMEBODY AND ALL THOSE PLANS GO RIGHT OUT THE WINDOW!

TAKE THE TIME THEY MET-- YOU COULD HARDLY CALL IT A ROMANTIC SETTING! IT WAS JUST FRED--ACTING NORMALLY-- TRIPPING OVER HIS OWN FEET---

OH, I'M TERRIBLY SORRY-- THAT'S ALL YOU MUST LET ME PAY FOR THE DAMAGE!

RIGHT-- ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN!



FROM SUCH A BEGINNING, ROMANCE BLOSSOMED! AND EVENTUALLY THEY MARRIED! BUT THAT DIDN'T CHANGE FRED--IF ANYTHING, THE NERVOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION MADE HIM EVEN CLUMSIER!

WELL, THAT'S ONE WAY OF GETTING YOUR BRIDE OVER THE THRESHOLD!

OH, RITA--RITA -- FORGIVE ME! I'M SUCH A CLUMSY LOUT!



THEY SET UP HOUSEKEEPING -- AND AT FIRST THE CLUMSINESS OF FRED WAS TAKEN AS A BIG JOKE!

NOW LOOK WHAT I'VE DONE! I KNEW I SHOULD HAVE LET YOU HANG THIS PICTURE!

HA! HA! YOU LOOK SO RIDICULOUS, DARLING -- AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE PAINTING -- WE CAN ALWAYS GET SOME POOR ARTIST TO PAINT US ANOTHER!



BUT THERE WERE TIMES WHEN FRED'S CLUMSINESS WASN'T SO FUNNY--TIMES WHEN IT EMBARRASSED HIS WIFE WHO WAS TRYING TO IMPRESS PEOPLE!

WATCH IT-- YOU CLUMSY FOOL!

OH, GOSH, I'M REALLY SORRY-- REALLY SORRY!



BUT SHE LOVED FRED--THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF THAT-- ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS TAKE HER IN HIS ARMS AND SHE FORGOT ALL ABOUT HIS BEING CLUMSY -- ALL ABOUT THE EMBARRASSMENT HE CAUSED HER!

I LOVE YOU SO, RITA-- YOU'LL NEVER KNOW HOW MUCH!

OH FRED-- FRED-- FRED!



AND THEN HE WOULD KISS HER -- AND AT FIRST HER THOUGHTS WERE ONLY OF HER LOVE FOR THIS MAN -- BUT LATELY OTHER THOUGHTS WERE POPPING INTO HER HEAD--OTHER IDEAS--

IF ONLY WE HAD MONEY-- WEALTH-- THIS MARRIAGE WOULD BE PERFECT!



IN HIS LABORATORY, FRED WAS A DIFFERENT PERSON-- THERE THE CLUMSINESS AND THE AWKWARDNESS WERE GONE-- THERE HE WAS THE PICTURE OF EFFICIENCY-- A DEFT TOUCH BEHIND A SKILLED MIND --



LIKE MOST OF US, RITA KNEW LITTLE OF A SCIENTIST'S ACTIVITY-- AND AT TIMES CARED LESS-- BUT ON THIS PARTICULAR DAY SOME UNKNOWN BUG OF CURIOSITY GOT THE BEST OF HER --

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THAT ICE, FRED?
WHAT KIND OF EXPERIMENT IS THIS?

I'M TRYING SOMETHING WITH SUSPENDED ANIMATION -- TRYING TO KEEP THE CAT BARELY ALIVE FOR A PERIOD OF TIME!



NOW FRED WAS IN HIS GLORY-- NOW HE COULD TALK OF SOMETHING THAT WAS NEAR AND DEAR TO HIM-- AND TO A WIFE THAT EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN SOMETHING ELSE BESIDES MONEY!

THE RUSSIANS HAVE HAD SOME SUCCESS WITH SUSPENDED ANIMATION! AND I THINK I'VE FINISHED THEIR WORK! BY PACKING THE ANIMAL IN ICE I BELIEVE I CAN KEEP THIS ANIMAL LIKE THIS FOR YEARS!



BUT RITA WANTED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT SUSPENDED ANIMATION -- MUCH MORE!

WOULD IT WORK ON A HUMAN -- AND FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME -- SAY ABOUT SEVEN YEARS?

I'VE NEVER EXPERIMENTED WITH HUMANS, BUT I HAVE ENOUGH FAITH IN MY WORK TO SAY THAT IT WOULD WORK! AS FOR HOW LONG, I SUPPOSE YOU COULD KEEP SOMETHING SUSPENDED THAT LONG -- AS LONG AS SOMEONE WAS AROUND TO MAKE SURE THAT NOTHING WENT WRONG!



RITA HAD HEARD ENOUGH-- ENOUGH TO SET HER BRAIN WORKING -- A PLAN HAD BEEN BORN--

DON'T YOU WANT TO HEAR ME, DARLING -- IT ISN'T AS SIMPLE AS I MADE IT SOUND, YOU KNOW!

NO! I'VE HEARD ENOUGH-- RIGHT NOW I'VE GOT SOME THINKING TO DO-- AND I DON'T WANT TO DISTURB YOU-- NOT NOW!



YES, RITA HAD FOUND THE ANSWER-- THE ANSWER TO WHERE SHE WAS GOING TO GET THAT MONEY SHE HAS ALWAYS DREAMING ABOUT!

IT'S GOT TO WORK-- IT JUST HAS TO!



THE HOURS PASSED AND RITA THOUGHT THE WHOLE PLAN THROUGH--AND THAT NIGHT SHE REVEALED IT TO FRED--TO A SHOCKED FRED!



BUT RITA KNEW HOW TO GET AROUND HER HUSBAND -- FRED COULD NEVER RESIST HER SLIGHTEST WHIM ANYHOW--HE CERTAINLY COULDN'T NOW--



RITA WAS IN A HURRY TO START HER PLAN -- AND SO THE VERY NEXT DAY --



NOW FRED BEGAN TO SEE THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE SCHEME--AFTER ALL IT WAS HIS MONEY TOO--OR IT WOULD BE HIS MONEY IN SEVEN YEARS--



YES, THERE WAS A LOT MORE TO BE DONE--AND IMPATIENT FRED WAS IN A HURRY TO START--



RITA WAS SO CLEVER -- IT WASN'T EVERY MAN WHO HAD A WIFE LIKE THAT--NO WONDER FRED LOVED HER SO--AND SO THEY KISSED TO THEIR FUTURE -- A FUTURE THAT WOULD BE FILLED WITH WONDERS THAT WEALTH COULD ACQUIRE!



A YEAR PASSED AND FINALLY IT WAS TIME --

READY,
DARLING ?

YES!



NOW THE SCIENTIST WAS AT WORK -- NO LONGER
THE HUSBAND, FRED WAS THE PICTURE OF
EFFICIENCY -- HIS FINGERS WERE SURE AND DEFT--
AND HE WORKED WITHOUT HESITATION --

THERE -- JUST A LITTLE MORE ICE--
NOW -- GOT TO KEEP THAT
TEMPERATURE DOWN !



THE PERFECTIONIST IN THE MAN CAME INTO
PLAY -- NOW HE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO
SOMETHING HE'D ALWAYS DREAMED ABOUT --

NOW I CAN STRAIGHTEN
OUT THAT BUMP ON HER
NOSE -- SURE IS EASY
WHEN IT'S JUST
KE!



GENTLY HE PLACED THE ETHER CONE OVER HER
FACE -- HER LOVELY FACE -- A FACE THAT WAS
TO REMAIN HIDDEN FOR SEVEN LONG YEARS --

BREATHE DEEPLY
RITA -- BREATHE
DEEPLY!

GOODBYE -- MY
LOVE -- GOODBYE --
GOOD --

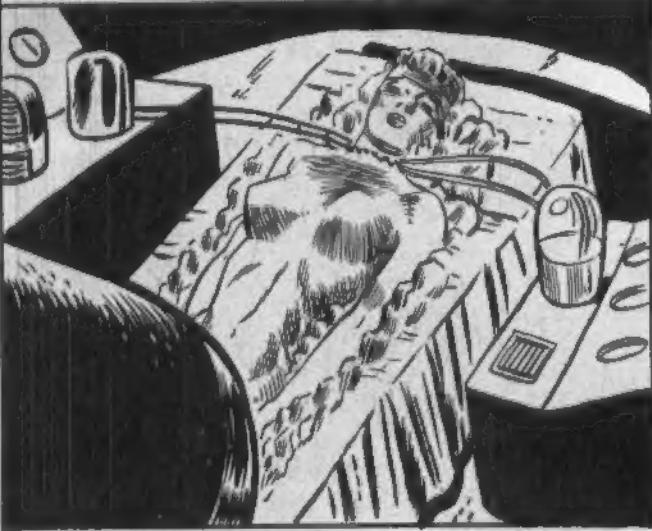


HE REMOVED THE BLOOD FROM HER BODY AND
FROZE IT INTO A SMALL BRACELET -- A BRACELET
WHICH HE STRUNG AROUND HER NECK -- HER
WHITE ALABASTER NECK -- HER PERFECT NECK --

MIght lose this --
BETTER KEEP
IT WITH HER!



FINALLY, THE TASK WAS FINISHED -- AND RITA LAY
THERE -- A SHIMMERING SHINY MOLD OF A
BEAUTIFUL WOMAN -- OF AN ICE WOMAN -- OF
A MONA LISA IN CRYSTAL --



FRED REPORTED RITA'S DISAPPEARANCE AND OF COURSE THERE WAS AN INQUEST! BUT THERE WAS NO BODY TO BE FOUND, UNDER THE LAW, HE WOULD HAVE TO WAIT SEVEN YEARS TO COLLECT THE MONEY! IT WAS JUST AS RITA HAD SAID-- JUST AS SHE FIGURED! IT WAS NO WONDER THAT HE LOVED RITA! WHO COULD HELP BUT LOVE A WOMAN LIKE RITA?

THE TIME PASSED AND MONTHS TURNED INTO YEARS AND SOMEHOW FRED MANAGED TO ACT THE PART OF THE MOURNING HUSBAND--FOR DEEP INSIDE HE WAS A MOURNING HUSBAND--WHAT FUN WAS THERE IN BEING MARRIED, WHEN HE HAD NO WIFE!

FINALLY FRED COULDN'T TAKE THE LONELINESS ANY LONGER--HE HAD TO SEE RITA--TO LOOK AT HER BEAUTIFUL FACE--AND SO AT THE LABORATORY...



BUT THE BEST PLANS ARE OFTEN UPSET-- AND AT THAT MOMENT--

SOMEBOY'S COMING --I MUST HIDE THE BODY-- GOT TO-- OH NO! NO! NO!



THE CLUMSY IDIOT--THE AWKWARD FOOL--NOW HIS CLUMSINESS HAD COST HIM--LOOK AT HER, FRED--BROKEN INTO A THOUSAND PIECES--TINY FRAGMENTS OF WHAT ONCE WAS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN--OF WHAT ONCE WAS YOUR WIFE! DON'T STAND THERE LIKE AN IDIOT--DO SOMETHING--DO SOMETHING BEFORE SHE MELTS!



HE HAD TO SAVE HER--BRING HER BACK TO LIFE--PUT THE PIECES BACK TOGETHER AGAIN! NO LONGER DID HE THINK OF THE MONEY-- NOW HE WAS ONLY INTERESTED IN SAVING HIS WIFE--BUT SHE WAS LIKE A JIG-SAW PUZZLE--HIS JOB WAS TO PUT HER TOGETHER--BEFORE IT WAS TOO LATE!

YES, HE PUT HER BACK TOGETHER AGAIN--AS BEST HE COULD--BUT SOMEHOW SHE DIDN'T LOOK THE SAME--WELL, FRED WAS A LITTLE CLUMSY AT THAT SORT OF THING, AND THEN AGAIN, PARTS OF HER BODY MELTED, SO YOU COULDN'T EXPECT TOO NEAT A JOB-- COULD YOU?

LOOK AT ME, LOOK AT ME, YOU CLUMSY AWKWARD IDIOT! LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE!



FRED AND RITA ARE STILL MARRIED--BUT SOMEHOW THEY ACT A LITTLE COLD TOWARD EACH OTHER! AND WHEN THEY EMBRACE, FRED COMPLAINS THAT SHE FEELS 'LIKE ICE!' AND OF COURSE RITA DOESN'T DARE GO OUT INTO THE SUN...WELL, WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT WHEN SOMEBODY'S ASSETS ARE FROZEN? HEH-HEH-HEH!

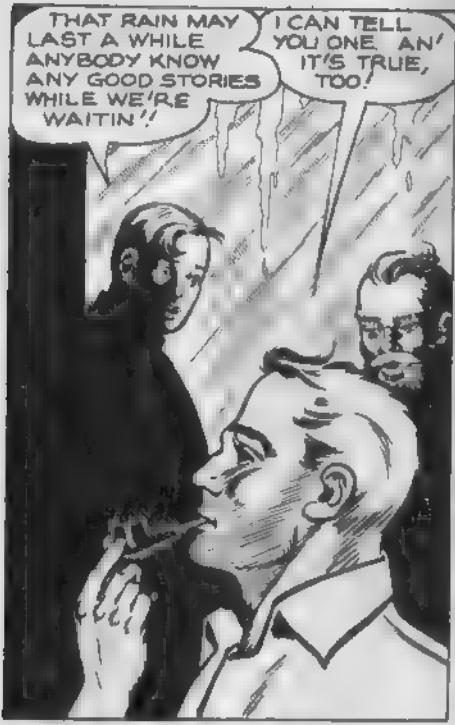


NOBODY TAKES THIS SORT OF STORY SERIOUSLY...
THAT WOULD BE SHEER NONSENSE, FOR EVERYONE
KNOWS THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A

AS THE 4:06 FREIGHT SLOWED DOWN TO MAKE
THE SHARP TURN AT CRAGSHILL JUNCTION,
FOUR GENTLEMEN OF THE ROAD DISEMBARKED
IN USUAL UNCREMONIOUS FASHION...

VAMPIRE



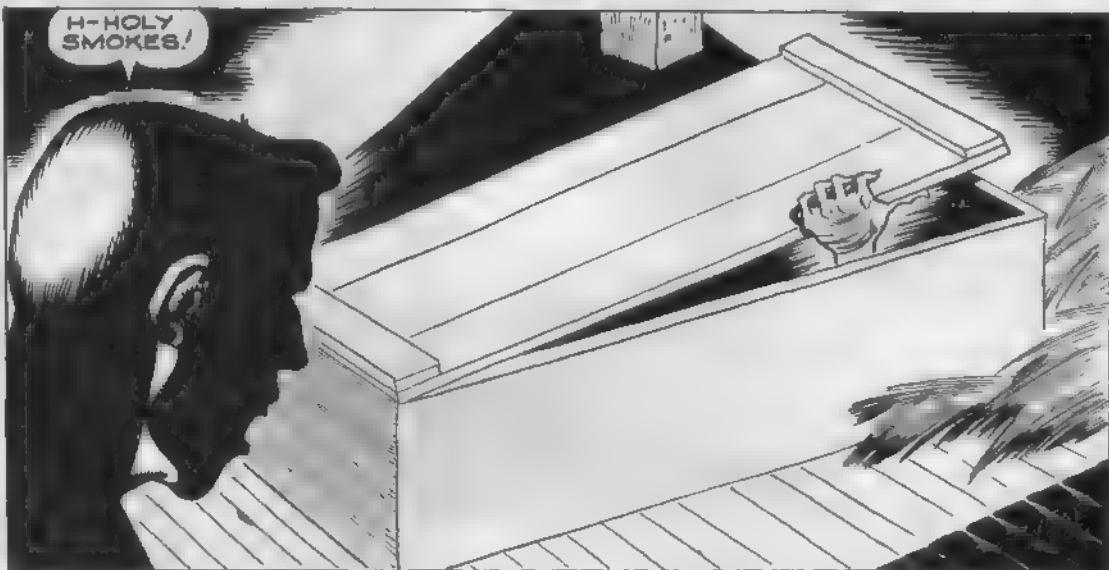


WELL, NOBODY TRIED TO LIFT THE LID TO FIND OUT THEY LET IT GO AT THAT, AND PRETTY SOON THEY WAS ALL ASLEEP...

IT MUSTA BEEN A LITTLE PAST MIDNIGHT WHEN SOMETHIN' WOKE ONE OF 'EM UP ..



HE LOOKED AROUND IN THE DARKNESS, AND ALL OF A SLODDEN HE SEEN IT! THE MOON WAS SHININ' RIGHT ON THAT COFFIN AN' DARNED IF THERE WASN'T SOMETHIN' INSIDE THAT BOX PUSHIN' UP THE LID!



THE POOR GINK WAS SO SCARED HE COULDN'T DO NOTHIN' BUT WATCH... AND PRETTY SOON, OUT OF THE COFFIN STEPS THE MOST GORGEOUS BABE HE EVER LAID EYES ON...



AS CALM AS YOU PLEASE, SHE WALKS OVER TO ONE OF THEM SLEEPIN' HOBOES AN' BENDS DOWN AN' KISSES HIM...A REAL, LONG KISS...



BUT A COUPLE OF MINUTES LATER SHE PICKS HER HEAD UP AN' WHAT HE SEES IS ENOUGH TO FREEZE WATER IN HELL... SHE'S GOT FANGS LIKE AN ANIMAL AND HER MOUTH IS DRIPPING...



BY THIS TIME, THE POOR GUY WAS SO PARALYZED HE COULDN'T EVEN SHAKE NO MORE! SHE FINISHED WITH THE FIRST GUY AND STARTED IN ON THE SECOND...



SHE WASN'T MORE THAN FOUR FEET FROM HIM WHEN SHE FINALLY FINISHED OFF THE SECOND COURSE AND LOOKED AT HIM FOR DESSERT. AND BROTHER, WHAT A LOOK THAT WAS...



WELL, THAT SNAPPED HIM OUT OF IT! HE JUMPED UP AND MADE A RUN FOR THE DOOR, SCREAMIN' HIS HEAD OFF!



...AND SUNK 'EM RIGHT INTO HIS THROAT...



BUT SHE WAS TOO FAST FOR HIM.



WITH THE STRENGTH OF A GORILLA SHE HELD HIM SO HE COULDN'T MOVE... THEN SHE BARED HER FANGS...



THE PAIN WAS HORRIBLE, AND HE FIGURED HIMSELF FOR A GONER WHEN SUDDENLY HE SPOTTED SOMETHIN' THAT HE KNEW WAS HIS ONLY CHANCE... A TREE WITH A LOW BRANCH STICKIN' STRAIGHT OUT



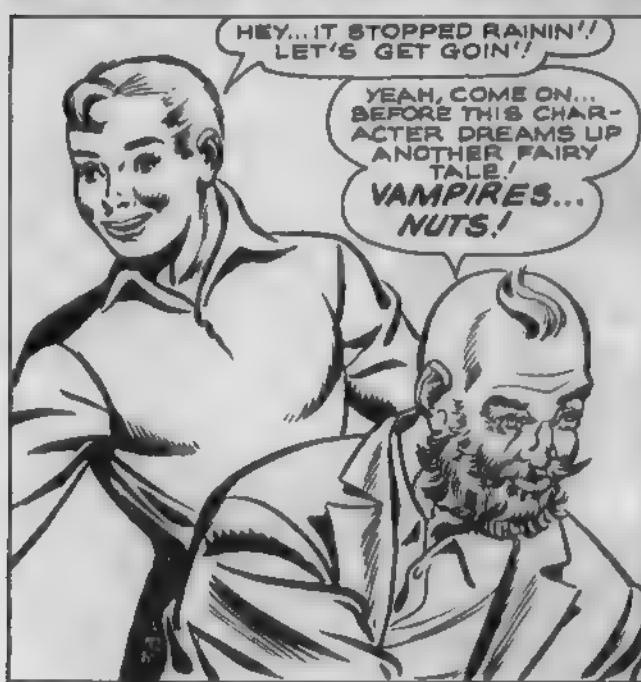
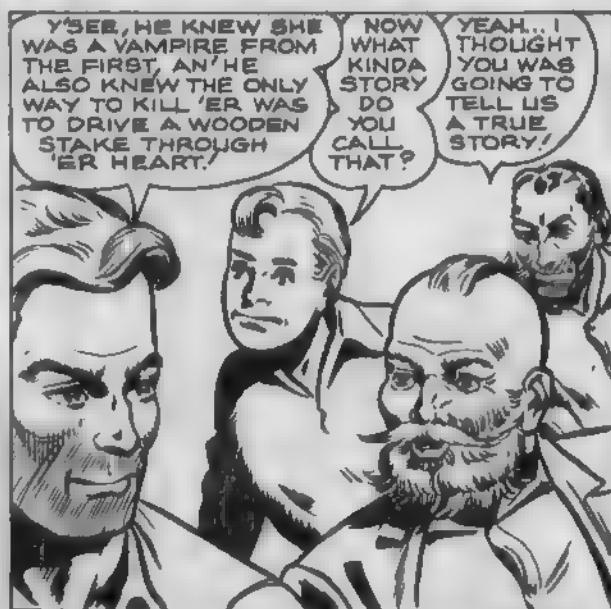
WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH HE PUSHED, MAKIN' HER STAGGER BACKWARDS TOWARD THE TREE...



THEN WITH A MIGHTY SHOVE, HE RAMMED HER INTO THAT BRANCH AND DROVE IT RIGHT THROUGH HER BACK AND INTO HER HEART!...



THE NEXT MORNING THEY WERE FOUND. THE TWO HOBOS LYIN' DEAD IN THE BARN, THE BLOOD DRAINED CLEAN OUT OF 'EM. THE THIRD ONE UNDER THE TREE UNCONSCIOUS, BUT STILL ALIVE... AND HER... HANGIN' ON THAT BRANCH... DEAD....



AS THE OTHER THREE MEN BEGAN THEIR HIKE TO TOWN, THE STORY TELLER PAUSED FOR A MOMENT! OUTSIDE THE BARN STOOD A TREE, AND AS HE STUDIED THE STUMP WHERE A BRANCH HAD RECENTLY BEEN SAWED OFF, HIS HAND INSTINCTIVELY CAME UP AND PINCHED THE TINY SCARS ALONG HIS THROAT...



THE END.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN LOST? HAVE YOU EVER KNOWN THE PANIC AND UNUTTERABLE TERROR OF BEING TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY LOST? YOU HAVEN'T? -- THEN COME WITH JIM AND BETSY KEEGAN -- COME WITH THEM THROUGH AND BEYOND ---

THE DOOR



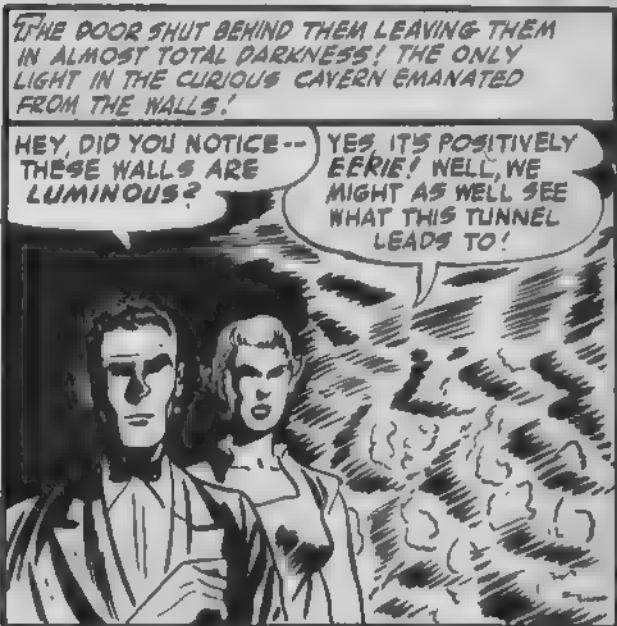
BETSY AND JIM KEEGAN WERE A HAPPY CAREFREE COUPLE AND THEY LIKED TO SPEND THEIR TIME DOING HAPPY, CAREFREE THINGS ---

OOH, THE FUN HOUSE! LET'S GO IN, JIM!

OKAY! LOOK AT THAT DEVIL, -- SEEMS ALMOST REAL!

THE FUN HOUSE WAS ALL THAT WAS CLAIMED FOR IT -- CRAZY-LOOKING, COCKEYED ROOMS, HILARIOUS CURVED MIRRORS; FLOORS THAT COLLAPSED UNDER YOU ---





IT WAS AT THAT MOMENT THAT JIM KEEGAN KNEW A MOMENT OF PANIC, FOR HE REALIZED SUDDENLY THAT HE HADN'T THE VAGUDEST NOTION AS TO HOW TO GET BACK--

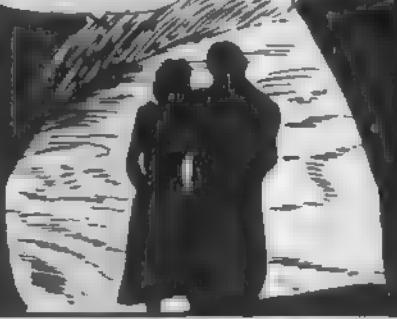
WELL THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO--WE'LL HAVE TO KEEP ON GOING AND TRUST TO LUCK! THIS TUNNEL HAS TO END SOMEWHERE!



BUT THE TUNNEL DID NOT END! IT WENT ON AND ON--TURNING, TWISTING, BRANCHING INTO COUNTLESS TRIBUTARIES-- LEADING THEM DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE ENDLESS MAZE---

JIM! I'M SCARED! WHAT DOES IT MEAN? WHY CAN'T WE FIND OUR WAY OUT?

I DON'T KNOW, BABY, BUT WE'VE GOT TO KEEP GOING!



THEY DID KEEP GOING! FOR HOURS AND HOURS THEY SEARCHED, TERROR GRIPPING THEM TIGHTER AND TIGHTER IN ITS SUFFOCATING GRASP! HUNGRY, FRIGHTENED AND EXHAUSTED, THEY REALIZED THAT THEY WERE COMPLETELY AND IRRETRIEVABLY LOST---

JIM, WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO US? WE'LL STARVE TO DEATH--NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW! OH, JIM--IT'S HORRIBLE!

EASY HONEY--EASY! WE'LL FIND A WAY!



SUDDENLY FROM OUT OF THE DARKNESS A FIGURE APPEARED ---



THE CREATURE STAGGERED FORWARD --- LAUGHED ONCE IN A STRANGE CRACKED HIGH-PITCHED VOICE, AND THEN FELL AT THEIR FEET, HIS WHOLE BODY WRACKED WITH SOBS AND HYSTERICAL WEEEPING ---



PARALYZED INTO SPEECHLESSNESS THEY WAITED UNTIL THE STRANGER HAD REGAINED HIS COMPOSURE. THEN THEY LISTENED SILENTLY AS HE TOLD THEM A STRANGE TALE ---

MY NAME IS CONRAD STEINER! I AM--I WAS A CIVIL ENGINEER! FIVE YEARS AGO I WAS SENT TO THIS LOCATION TO SURVEY THE AREA FOR A POSSIBLE AMUSEMENT PARK!



I WAS LOOKING OVER THE SITE WHEN I RAN ACROSS A STRANGE DOOR CARVED IN THE SIDE OF A CLIFF! I ENTERED IT AND---WELL I GOT LOST SOMEHOW AND HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FIND MY WAY OUT SINCE! YOU ARE THE FIRST HUMAN BEINGS I HAVE SEEN IN ALL THAT TIME!

FIVE YEARS! GOOD HEAVENS!

HOW HAVE YOU MANAGED TO STAY ALIVE WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER?



STEINER EXPLAINED THAT WATER WAS PLENTIFUL AS THE WALLS WERE CONSTANTLY COVERED WITH MOISTURE--

AS FOR FOOD--THIS GREEN MOLD OR WHATEVER IT IS HAS KEPT ME ALIVE SOMEHOW!

BUT THE DOOR--DO YOU THINK YOU WILL EVER FIND IT AGAIN? IS THERE A POSSIBILITY OF OUR FINDING OUR WAY BACK TO THE DOOR?

WE WILL CONTINUE TO SEARCH FOR IT! YOU SEE, HERE IN THE LABYRINTH THERE IS NOT MUCH ELSE TO DO BUT SEARCH FOR THE DOOR!

SO THEY SEARCHED, LIVING SOLELY ON THE PECULIAR TASTELESS GREEN MOLD THAT CLUNG TO THE STONE WALLS! DAYS TURNED INTO WEEKS AND WEEKS INTO MONTHS -- GRADUALLY BETSY AND JIM FELT THEIR HOPES EBBING, AND AS HOPE LEFT THEM, SO, LITTLE BY LITTLE, DID THEIR SANITY --



THEY BECAME MERE SHADOWS OF THEIR FORMER SELVES AND STILL THEY WALKED AND WALKED SEARCHING INCESSANTLY, ENDLESSLY FOR THE DOOR -- THE DOOR TO CIVILIZATION -- TO SUNLIGHT -- TO LIFE! IT BURNED IN THEIR MINDS -- CONSUMED THEM -- DROVE THEM



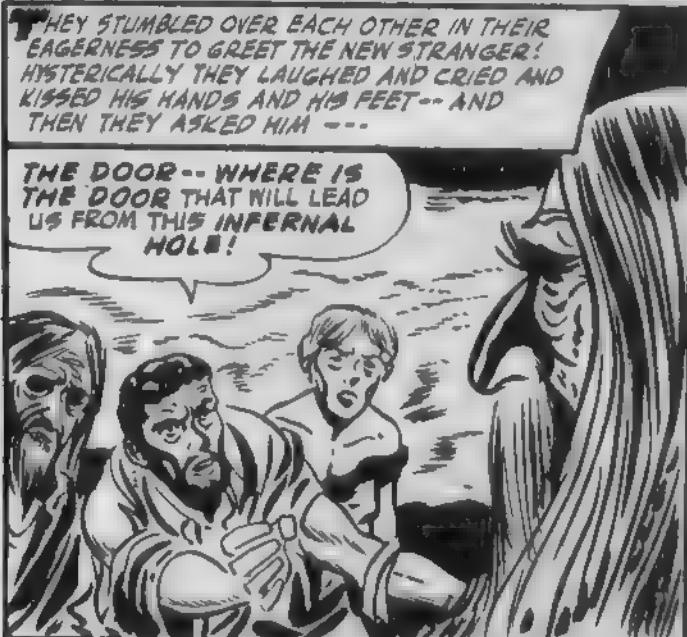
--AND THEN ONE DAY--

A MAN!
A MAN!

HE SEES US! HURRY--
HE'LL KNOW WHERE THE
DOOR IS-- HE MUST
KNOW!



THEY STUMBLED OVER EACH OTHER IN THEIR EAGERNESS TO GREET THE NEW STRANGER! HYSTERICALLY THEY LAUGHED AND CRIED AND KISSED HIS HANDS AND HIS FEET -- AND THEN THEY ASKED HIM --



HE GAZED AT THEM -- CURIOUSLY AT FIRST, AND THEN HE SMILED -- A SAD, SLOW SMILE! AT LAST HE SPOKE --

STRANGE THAT YOU SHOULD ASK ME THAT QUESTION -- YOU SEE, I HAVE BEEN SEARCHING FOR THE DOOR FOR THIRTY YEARS!



TIME BECAME MEANINGLESS NOW -- AND THE DOOR
BECAME AN OBSESSION -- ALWAYS ELUDING THEM --
ALWAYS BEYOND THEIR GRASP --

I CAN'T -- GO -- ON --
LEAVE -- ME -- LET --
ME -- DIE -- !

NO! NO! WE CAN'T STOP
NOW -- YOU CAN'T
GIVE UP!

THEY HAD JUST ABOUT GIVEN UP -- HOPE
HAD DRAINED FROM THEIR SOULS -- WHEN --

LOOK --
A
DOOR!

BUT -- IS -- IT --
THE -- RIGHT --
ONE?

THEY STOOD BEFORE THE PORTAL -- AFRAID
TO OPEN IT -- AFRAID THAT THIS WAS NOT THE
ANSWER TO THEIR SEARCH -- AFRAID THAT
THEY WOULD BE DOOMED FOR THE REST
OF THEIR DAYS --

GO AHEAD --
OPEN IT --
OPEN IT!

SLOWLY JIM OPENED THE DOOR -- AND THEY
LOOKED THROUGH TO FREEDOM -- TO WHERE
FREEDOM SHOULD BE -- THEN THE SCENE
BEFORE THEM REVEALED ITSELF AND THEY
RECOILED IN HORROR -- IN TERROR -- !

-- YES, THEY HAD FINALLY FOUND THE DOOR -- THE RIGHT DOOR - THE DOOR TO HADES!

WELCOME -- WELCOME -- I SEE YOU FOUND THE
WAY! GOOD! GOOD! ALWAYS ROOM FOR A FEW
MORE! HEH -- HEH -- HEH!

THE
END

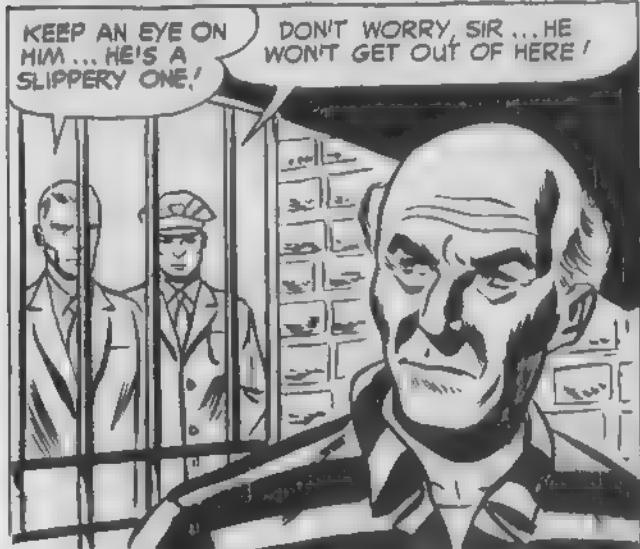
THE MASTER CONFIDENCE MAN... KNEW ALL THE TRICKS... HAD NO FEARS... FOR SILAS DUMAS ALWAYS HAD AN ACE UP HIS SLEEVE... THAT WAS...

The DISGUISE!



THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY FINALLY PICKED UP SILAS DUMAS... BUT PICKING HIM UP WAS ONE THING, KEEPING HIM WAS ANOTHER...

SILAS DUMAS WATCHED THE TWO LAWMEN LEAVE... AND SMILED TO HIMSELF... HE HAD BEEN IN MUCH WORSE SPOTS THAN THIS... MUCH WORSE!



THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA WAS FORMED WHEN HE LOOKED OUT THE CELL WINDOW ONTO THE STREET BELOW...

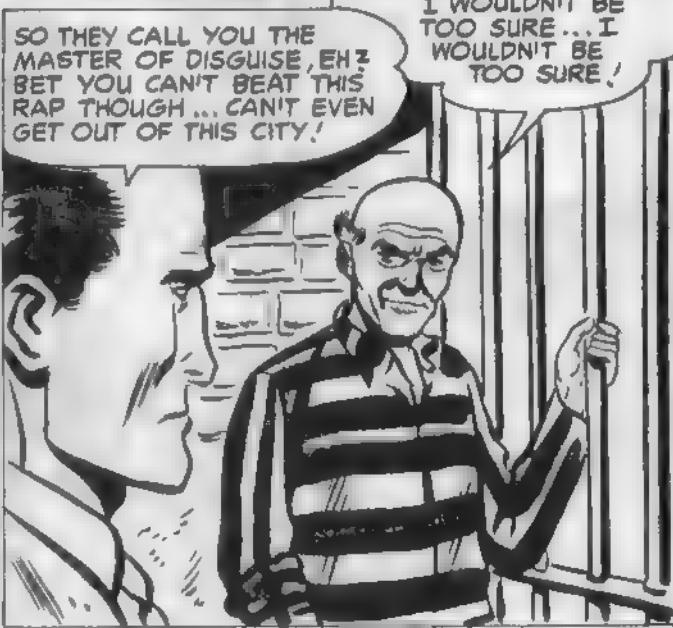


BUT AN IDEA WAS ALSO BORN IN THE MIND OF THE DA AS HE VIEWED THE SAME SCENE...



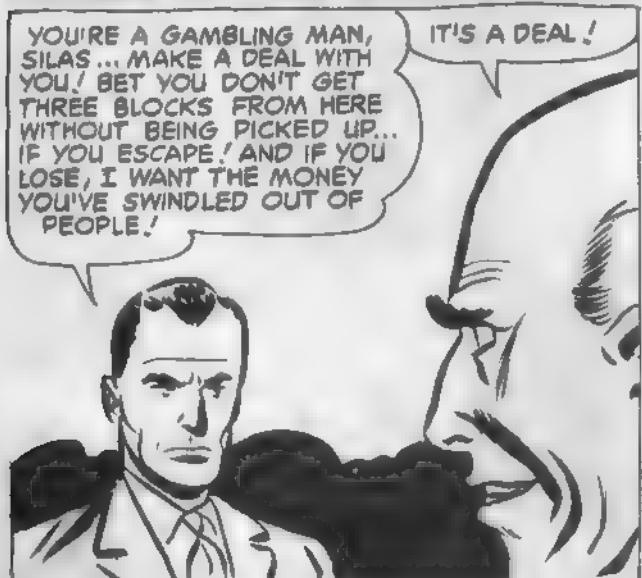
IT TOOK HIM BUT A SHORT TIME TO SET THE WHEELS GOING...

NOW THE NEXT PART...



NOW THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY WAS BEING THE CONFIDENCE MAN... WAS SETTING UP THE DEAL...

SILAS WAS ALWAYS A GAMBLER... AND HE WAS WILLING TO GAMBLE THIS TIME... FOR IT WAS A SURE THING... HOW COULD HE MISS...



NEVER MIND HOW SILAS GOT OUT OF JAIL... THAT DOESN'T CONCERN US...

GOOD THING THAT STORE CLOSES EARLY... THIS HAS GOT TO BE GOOD!



IT WAS A SIMPLE MATTER FOR SILAS TO ENTER THE STORE... A MAN IN HIS BUSINESS BECOMES PROFICIENT AT THAT SORT OF THING...



HE MADE HIS WAY THROUGH THE SHOP TO THE BACK ROOM...

FIRST TO CHANGE HIS FACE... AND THE MASTER OF DISGUISE WENT QUICKLY TO WORK IN THE DIM LIGHT...



NOW TO CHANGE HIS CLOTHES... WHAT BETTER PLACE THAN A COSTUME STORE TO FIND A DISGUISE...

WISH I COULD SEE BETTER... GOTTA CHANGE THE SHAPE OF MY NOSE!

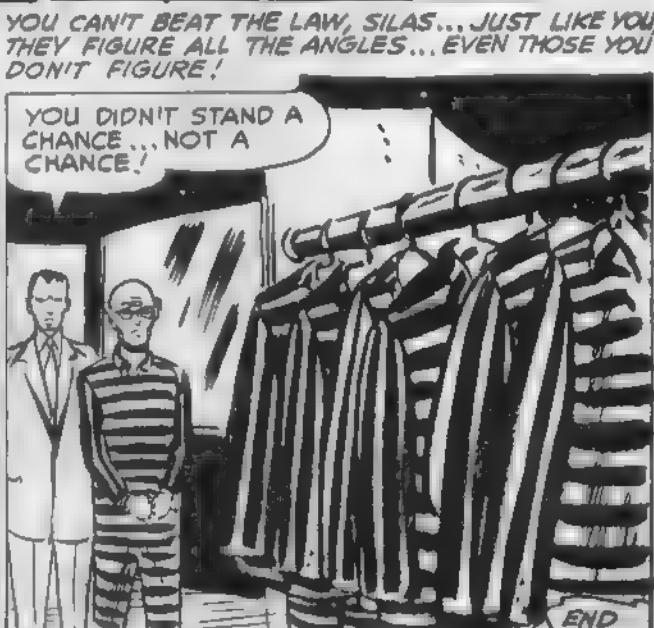
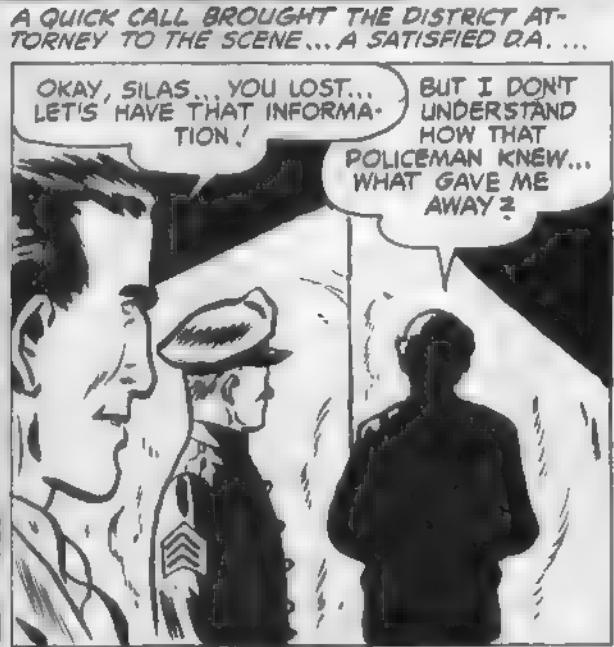


SURE, WISH IT WAS LIGHT OUT... BUT ANYTHING WILL BE BETTER THAN THAT PRISON GARB!

THEN HE WAS FINISHED... THE DISGUISE WAS PERFECT... HE'D SHOW THAT DA WHAT IT MEANT TO WAGER WITH THE MASTER!



THE DARKNESS OF THE STREET ENGULFED HIM AND BUT SUDDENLY THE PIERCING SHRILL OF A POLICE-HE STAYED IN THE SHADOWS JUST TO MAKE SURE... MAN'S WHISTLE BROUGHT HIM UP SHORT...



THROUGH THE PAGES OF HISTORY MAN HAS FOREVER REVERED HIS WOMEN... HE HAS PLACED THEM ON A PEDESTAL WHERE THEY ARE TO BE ADMIRE... ADORED... AND LOVED! AND IN THE YEAR 2253 MAN HAS NOT CHANGED... BUT NEITHER HAS THE FEMALE AND SO THE STRONGER SEX CONTINUES BLISSFULLY ON WITH THIS RELATIONSHIP, NEVER REALIZING THAT HIS PARTNER IS...

MORE DEADLY THAN THE MALE



TENSELY THE EARTHMEN PREPARED THEMSELVES FOR THE LANDING ON THE UNEXPLORED FOURTH PLANET OF THE STAR PROXIMA CENTAURI! THEY HAD TRAVELED FOUR LONG YEARS FROM MOTHER EARTH AND WERE THE FIRST MORTALS TO REACH THE DISTANT SOLAR SYSTEM...

BRACE YOURSELVES, MEN... WE'RE GOING IN FOR A LANDING!

SHE'S LEVEL-
ING OFF...
FIVE... FOUR...
THREE... TWO...
ONE! FIRE
RETARDO-JETS!

SLOWLY THE GIANT CRAFT SETTLED TO THE GROUND AND A FEW MOMENTS LATER...

SIR, THE AIR IS CHEMICALLY DIFFERENT THAN OUR ATMOSPHERE... BUT IT'S BREATHABLE!

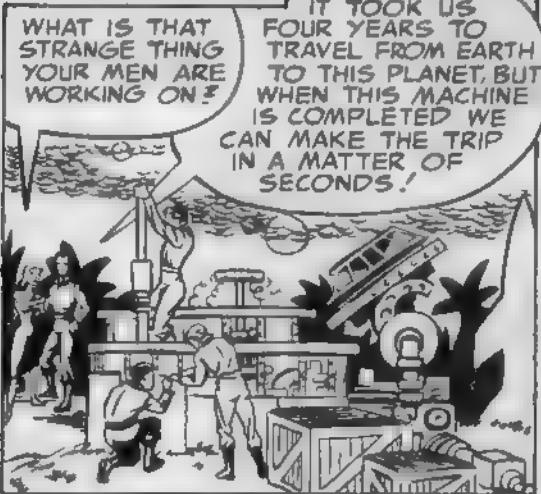
CAPTAIN POPE! LOOK INTO THE VIEWER... OUR SHIP IS SURROUNDED... BY... BY...



EAGERLY THE MEN LOOKED INTO THE VIEWER! WHAT MONSTERS LURKED IN THE UNKNOWN! BUT YOU COULD HARDLY CALL THESE MONSTERS...



IT TOOK BUT A FEW DAYS FOR THE EARTHMEN TO SET UP CAMP AND TO BEGIN WORK ON THEIR ASSIGNED PROJECT! A PROJECT THAT IF IT WAS TO SUCCEED WOULD REVOLUTIONIZE THE METHOD OF SPACE TRAVEL!



BASICALLY A SHY MAN, LANCE BID HIS TIME WITH THE BEAUTIFUL CREATURE! BUT NOTICING THE LACK OF ANY NATIVE MALES IT WASN'T TOO LONG BEFORE HE STRUCK UP A FRIENDSHIP WITH THE ALLURING GIRL!



AS YOU CAN SEE, FEMININE LURES HAD EVEN PENETRATED TO THE VOIDS OF OUTER SPACE! AND THIS WAS A FRIENDSHIP THAT WAS DESTINED TO BLOSSOM EVEN FURTHER! BUT AT THAT INSTANT A STRANGE PERIL WAS SEEN IN THE SKIES!



LANCE DAYSTROM WAS THE CHIEF ENGINEER ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE E.E.I.T... BUT THERE WERE TIMES WHEN HE FOUND IT RATHER DIFFICULT TO CONCENTRATE ON THE TASK AT HAND...



THE TERRIBLE INVADERS WERE ON THE UNSUSPECTING EARTHMEN BEFORE THEY KNEW WHAT HAPPENED...



DESPERATELY LANCE TRIED TO FIGHT OFF THE MONSTER... BUT HE WAS NO MATCH FOR ITS SUPERIOR STRENGTH AND WAS FIGHTING A LOSING BATTLE...

IT... IT'S... NO... USE... HE'S... TOO... POWERFUL...



...UNTIL LACTRA ENTERED THE FIGHT. LANCE WATCHED IN AMAZEMENT AT HER TACTICS WHICH DEFIED DESCRIPTION...



...A TACTIC THAT SUDDENLY PARALYZED THE WINGED SCAB WHICH FELL HELPLESSLY AT LANCE'S FEET...



WHAT THE... IT'S... IT'S... HELPLESS!

...AND BEING THE MASTERFUL MALE, LANCE QUICKLY RECOVERED HIS SENSES AND FINISHED OFF THE MONSTER!



IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE THE SPACEMEN WITH THEIR SUPERIOR WEAPONS HAD BEATEN OFF THE WINGED INVADERS... AND THE BATTLE ENDED IN A COMPLETE VICTORY FOR THE EARTHMEN AND LACTRA'S PEOPLE!

THEY'VE GONE!
THEY'VE GONE!
YOU'VE BEATEN
THEM OFF!



AFTER THE DEFEAT OF THE WINGED SCABS, THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN LANCE AND LACTRA NATURALLY DEVELOPED EVEN FURTHER!

AND JUST AS NATURALLY BLOSSOMED INTO LOVE! IT WAS DIFFICULT, OF COURSE, BECAUSE, LANCE, AS YOU'VE DISCOVERED, WAS STILL RATHER SHY...

I... ER... DON'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN... BUT I THINK YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY IT... I... I UNDERSTAND... DARLING!

LANCE DIDN'T HAVE TO EXPRESS HIS FEELINGS... HIS ARDENT KISS SPOKE FOR HIM... AND LACTRA UNDERSTOOD!



THE NEXT DAY WAS TO BE A DAY FULL OF SURPRISES AND WONDERFUL NEWS TO THE PEOPLE IN LOVE!

DARLING, I HAVE WONDERFUL NEWS... I TOLD THE CAPTAIN WE WANT TO GET MARRIED AND HE SAID HE'LL LET US BE THE FIRST PEOPLE TRANSENERGIZED TO EARTH THROUGH THE E.E.I.T.!

THAT'S MARVELOUS... I'VE HEARD SO MUCH ABOUT YOUR PLANET THAT I'LL JUST HAVE TO SEE IT TO BELIEVE IT!



I TOLD MOTHER AND SHE'S VERY THRILLED ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED...

...AND I THINK IT'S WONDERFUL THAT YOU TWO CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT WORLDS HAVE FOUND LOVE IN EACH OTHER!



THIS OCCASION CALLS FOR A LITTLE CELEBRATION SO I'VE PREPARED A SMALL FEAST!

IT IS OUR CUSTOM NOT TO REFUSE FOOD ONCE IT IS SERVED! BUT I'M SURE YOU WILL ENJOY MOTHER'S COOKING!



IT WAS A RATHER STRANGE AND MORBID FEAST THAT WAS SET BEFORE LANCE! BUT HE REMEMBERED WHAT HAD HAPPENED WITH THE WINGED SCABS AND SIMPLY PASSED IT OFF AS ONE OF THE CUSTOMS OF THE PEOPLE... OR TRIED TO!

MMH, THESE ARE DELICIOUS... WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, LANCE?

WELL... I'M NOT REALLY VERY HUNGRY!



THE DAY PASSED QUICKLY AND LIKE TWO STRANGERS GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER, WAS SPENT IN FINDING OUT ABOUT THE OTHERS DIFFERENT BACKGROUND!

DARLING, I DON'T BELIEVE I'VE SEEN ANY MEN SINCE I'VE BEEN HERE! WHERE ARE THEY?

WHEN THEY BECOME OLD ENOUGH TO MATE OUR LAW REQUIRES THAT THEY STAY ON ANOTHER PART OF THE PLANET!

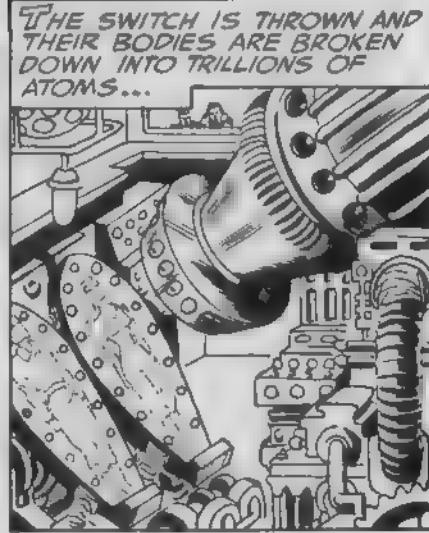


FINALLY, AFTER WHAT SEEMED AN ETERNITY, THE DAY THEY HAD BEEN WAITING FOR ARRIVED... THE COMPLETION OF THE E.E.I.T.! EVERYTHING WAS THOROUGHLY CHECKED AND THE TWO LOVERS WERE PLACED SIDE BY SIDE IN THE MACHINE...

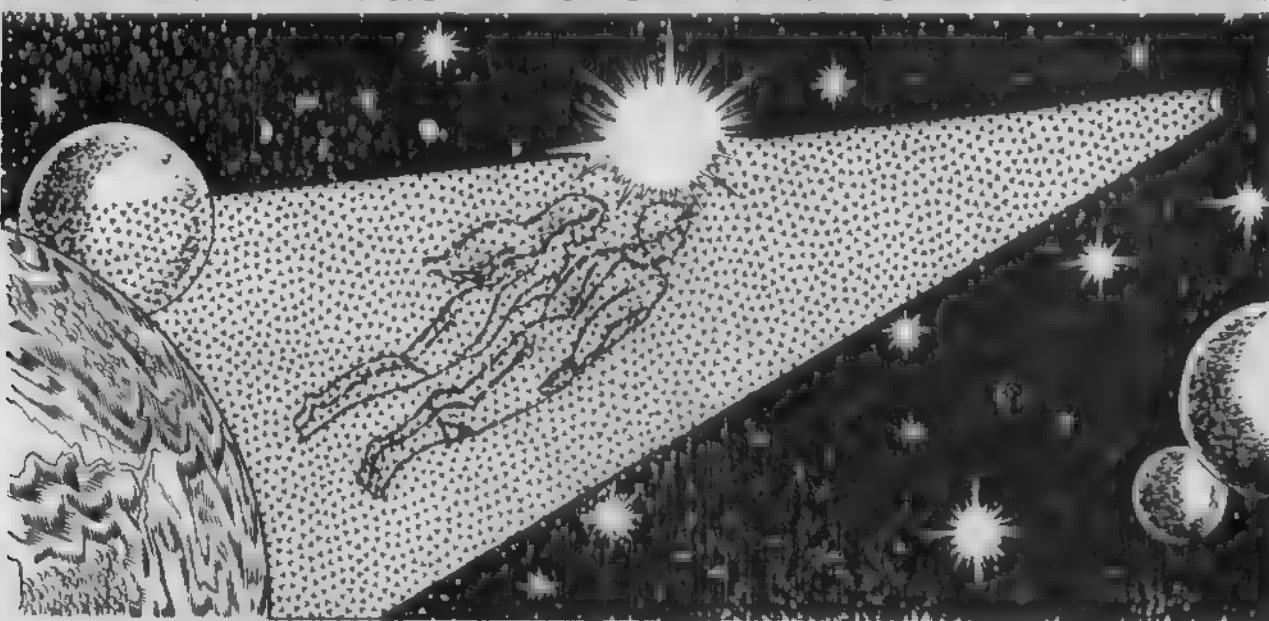
DON'T BE FRIGHTENED, MY LOVE... WE'LL BE ON EARTH BEFORE YOU KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED!

WITH YOU BESIDE ME I HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR!

THE SWITCH IS THROWN AND THEIR BODIES ARE BROKEN DOWN INTO TRILLIONS OF ATOMS...



... WHICH ARE DIFFUSED THROUGH THE LIGHT BEAM THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THE TWO PLANETS...



... THE ATOMS ARE PICKED UP BY THE RECEIVING MACHINE ON EARTH, REBUILT TO THEIR ORIGINAL FORM AND A FEW MOMENTS LATER LANCE AND LACTRA MATERIALIZE TO BEGIN THEIR LIFE ANEW!

WELCOME HOME, DARLING... WELCOME TO EARTH!

WHY... WHY... IT'S BEAUTIFUL! IT'S EVERYTHING YOU SAID AND MORE!

THE HONEYMOONERS SUFFERED THROUGH THE MANY CUSTOMARY CEREMONIES AND EVENTUALLY SUCCEEDED IN ELUDING THE HIGH EARTH OFFICIALS...

WELL, DARLING... AT LAST WE'RE ALONE! HOW'S MY BRIDE TAKING EVERYTHING?

I... I... FEEL DIZZY... IT MUST BE THE ATMOSPHERIC CHANGE! MAYBE I'LL FEEL BETTER IN THE MORNING!



LANCE AWAKENED EARLY THE NEXT MORNING AND TURNED TO GREET HIS NEW BRIDE! OR TRIED TO!

WHAT THE... I... I'M TIED DOWN!



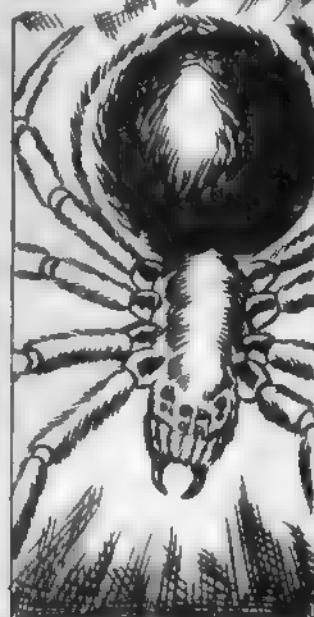
AT FIRST HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND IT! WAS THIS ANOTHER OF HER STRANGE CUSTOMS?



BUT AS SHE BITES INTO HIS NECK AND HE FEELS A BURNING POISONOUS VENOM SEEPING THROUGH HIS VEINS PARALYZING HIS EVERY MUSCLE... HE REALIZES THE ANSWER TO IT ALL!



NOW HE KNOWS WHY INSECTS WERE HER MAIN SOURCE OF FOOD... WHY HER HOME WAS A TENT OF SILK - SPUN SILK... WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO THE MALE POPULATION OF HER PLANET! NOW HE KNOWS ALL THOSE ANSWERS.



NOW HE KNOWS THAT HER FORM OF LIFE IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF A CERTAIN INSECT HERE ON EARTH... AN INSECT THAT DEVOURS THE MALE ONCE IT IS MATED... AN INSECT SCIENTIFICALLY NAMED THE LATRODECTUS MACTAN!



THE END

VOODOO MAGIC



IT ALL BEGAN ON THE ISLAND OF HAITI WHERE RICHIE AND HIS FAMILY WERE SPENDING THEIR VACATION --

WHY DON'T YOU GO FOR A SWIM, RICHIE -- THEY SAY YOU CAN'T BEAT SWIMMING IN THIS SURF!

YES, DEAR -- BUT PLEASE BE CAREFUL!



RICHIE WAS A STRANGE BOY -- QUIET, MOROSE -- AND COMING FROM WEALTHY PARENTS, HE WAS INCLINED TO BE SPOILED! AND IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THAT NATIVE BOY STRUGGLING IN THE SURF, THIS STORY MIGHT NEVER HAVE HAPPENED --

HELP! HELP! MUST HAVE A CRAMP -- AND NOBODY BUT ME AROUND TO HELP HIM!



RICHIE DIDN'T HESITATE -- BUT SWAM QUICKLY TO THE STRICKEN BOY'S SIDE --

MY LEG! MY LOG!

JUST TAKE IT EASY -- RELAX -- DO WHAT I SAY --

IT WAS A HARD SWIM BACK THROUGH THE SURGING SEAS TO THE BEACH - BUT RICHIE MADE IT! AND THERE THEY WERE MET BY THE BOY'S MOTHER - HIS GRATEFUL MOTHER --

MY SON! MY SON! YOU'RE ALONE! HOW CAN I EVER REPAY YOU?

BUT YOU DON'T OWE ME ANYTHING - ANYBODY WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME THING!



BUT THE NATIVE WOMAN WAS GRATEFUL - SHE HAD TO REPAY RICHIE - REPAY HIM ANY WAY SHE KNEW --

TONIGHT YOU WILL COME TO THE FORBIDDEN JUNGLE - THERE I WILL SHOW YOU THE SECRET OF THE LIVING DEAD - YOU WILL LEARN OF THE STRANGE POWERS THAT HAVE BEEN DENIED TO MEMBERS OF YOUR RACE --



RICHIE HAD HEARD OF THE STRANGE RITES OF THE NATIVES OF HAITI - BUT HAD NEVER BELIEVED THEM! BUT WHAT DID HE HAVE TO LOSE? SO THAT NIGHT --

YOU HAVE COME - GOOD -- BE QUIET NOW -- AND I SHALL SHOW YOU SECRETS THAT NO WHITEMAN'S EYES HAVE EVER WITNESSED!



AND SO RICHIE WATCHED -- AND LEARNED -- AND MARVELLED - FOR THERE BEFORE HIS EYES WAS REVEALED THE SECRETS OF THE AGES -- THE VOODOO RITES --

WATCH, MY SON - WATCH AND YOU SHALL BE MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE!

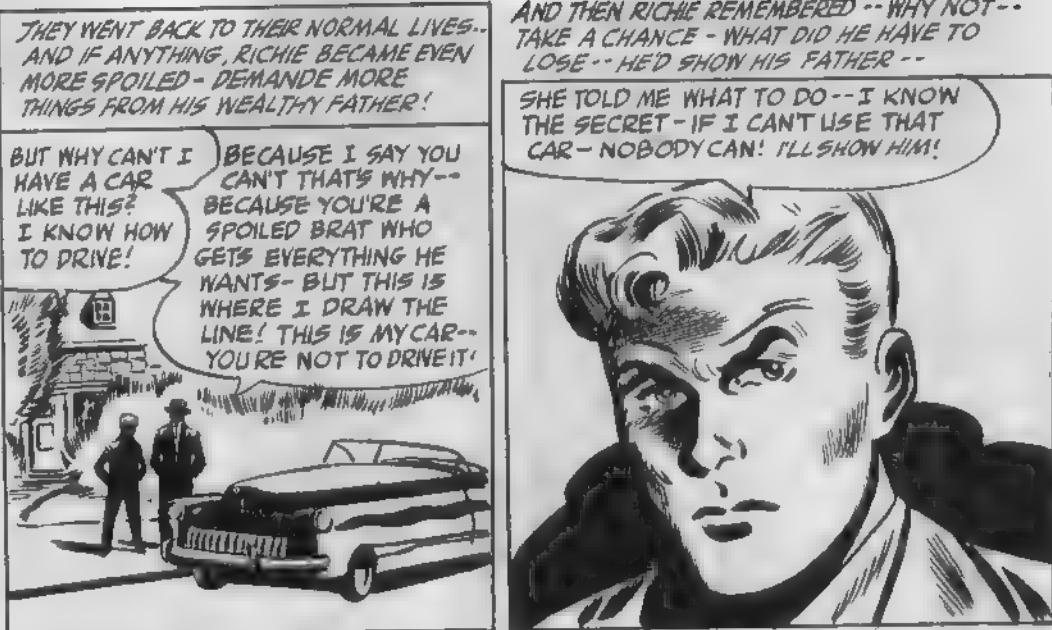


RICHIE SAW MUCH THAT NIGHT-- AND WONDERED-- BAH-- IT COULDN'T BE TRUE-- THINGS LIKE THAT JUST DON'T EXIST ANYMORE! AND THEN THE VACATION WAS OVER, AND THE FAMILY RETURNED HOME-- BACK TO THEIR NORMAL LIVES---

THEY WENT BACK TO THEIR NORMAL LIVES-- AND IF ANYTHING, RICHIE BECAME EVEN MORE SPOILED - DEMANDED MORE THINGS FROM HIS WEALTHY FATHER!

AND THEN RICHIE REMEMBERED -- WHY NOT-- TAKE A CHANCE - WHAT DID HE HAVE TO LOSE-- HE'D SHOW HIS FATHER --

SHE TOLD ME WHAT TO DO-- I KNOW THE SECRET - IF I CAN'T USE THAT CAR - NOBODY CAN! I'LL SHOW HIM!



AND FINALLY THE DUST FROM THE BONES OF THE CORPSE OF A MURDERER--

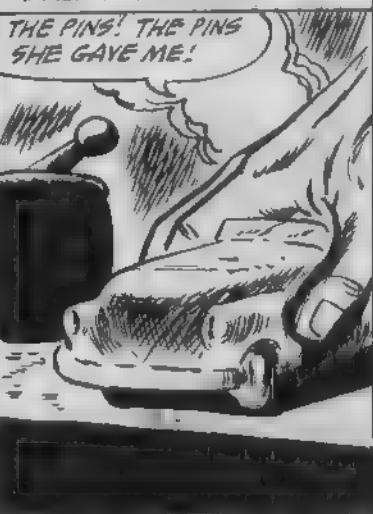
FIRST HE HAD TO PREPARE THE INGREDIENTS - THE HEART FROM A DEAD CHICKEN --

THEN THE MUD FROM THE LEFT SIDE OF A RIVER BANK SCOOPED UNDER A FULL MOON AT MIDNIGHT--

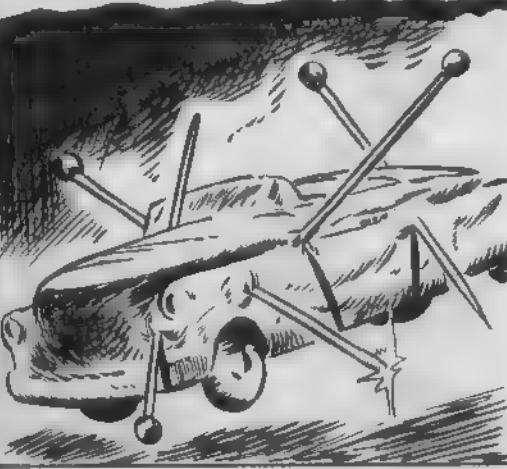


FINALLY IT WAS GATHERED TOGETHER - AND RICHIE MIXED THE STRANGE CONCOCTION AS HE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED --

NOW IT WAS FINISHED - JUST AS THE NATIVE WOMAN HAD TOLD HIM -- BUT ONE THING REMAINED TO BE DONE --



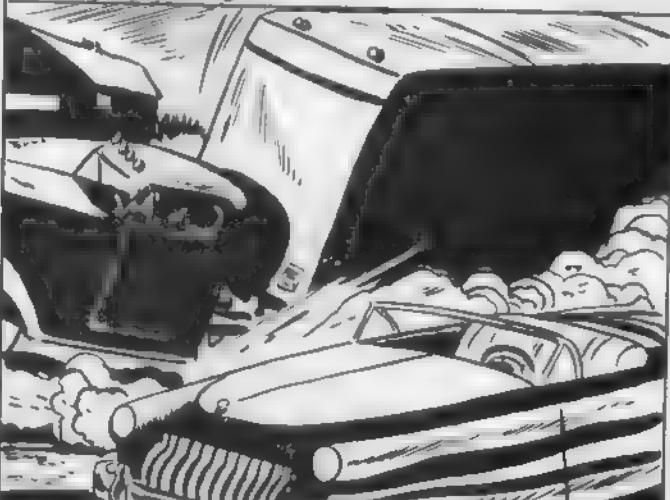
SLOWLY AND DELIBERATELY HE PLUNGED THE PINS INTO THE MODEL - AND REPEATED THE INCANTATION THAT HE HAD BEEN FORCED TO MEMORIZE! THEN IT WAS DONE - NOW IT WAS IN THE HANDS OF THE GODS -- THE VOODOO GODS!



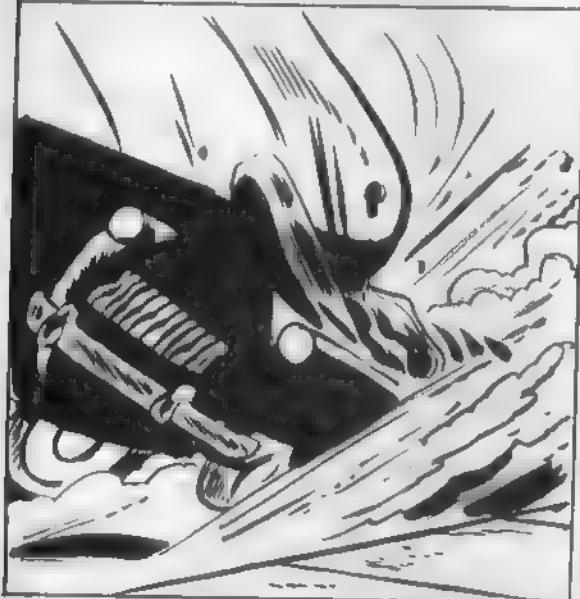
THEY WONDERED WHAT THE HUGE TRAILER TRUCK
WAS DOING ON THE STREET -- IT MUST HAVE
MADE A WRONG TURN --



THEN IT TURNED ONTO THE STREET WHERE RICHIE LIVED--
BUT IT WAS TOO HUGE TO TAKE THE CORNER --
MUCH TOO LARGE --



THERE WAS A LOUD CRASH - THE RIPPING OF
STEEL -- WHAT ONCE WAS A BEAUTIFUL CAR
NOW WAS A SMASHED WRECK --



IT WAS A SHAKY FATHER THAT EXAMINED WHAT WAS
LEFT - FOR HE COULD VERY WELL HAVE BEEN DRIVING
IT WHEN THE ACCIDENT HAPPENED --

MY CAR! MY CAR! HOW COULD THIS HAVE
HAPPENED - WHERE DID THAT TRUCK
COME FROM - IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN ON
THE HIGHWAY - NOT A RESIDENTIAL
STREET!



SEE HOW ACCIDENTS HAPPEN,
RICHIE - NOW AREN'T YOU
GLAD THAT I DIDN'T LET
YOU USE THE CAR?

HUH - OH, SURE,
DAD -- SURE!



RICHIE HADN'T EVEN HEARD WHAT HIS FATHER
SAID - FOR HE REALIZED NOW THAT THE NATIVE
WOMAN HADN'T LIED - SHE TOLD HIM THE SEC-
RETS OF THE UNIVERSE -- AN UNTOLD
POWER WAS RICHIE'S TO CONTROL !



NOW THAT RICHIE WAS SURE OF THE STRANGE POWER THAT HAD BEEN GIVEN TO HIM HE BECAME MORE CALM, MORE SERENE -- WHY NOT -- EVERYTHING WAS HIS FOR THE TAKING!

AND SO HE BIDED HIS TIME -- AND WAITED FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO TEST IT AGAIN!

LAURIE WAS A BEAUTIFUL GIRL - DID STRANGE THINGS TO A BOY - BUT FOR SOME REASON SHE NEVER GAVE HIM A TUMBLE - SHE ALWAYS HAD SOME EXCUSE WHEN HE'D ASK FOR A DATE --

THERE'S A BIG DANCE TONIGHT AT MY DAD'S CLUB, LAURIE - LIKE TO GO?

I WOULD -- BUT I HAVE TO STAY HOME TONIGHT - I'VE BEEN ELECTED BABY SITTER --

THAT NIGHT RICHIE THOUGHT HE'D GO OVER AND KEEP LAURIE COMPANY - BABY SITTING CAN GET KIND OF LONELY - BUT AS HE REACHED HER HOME -

SHE LIED TO ME - SHE DIDN'T WANT TO GO OUT WITH ME - I'LL SHOW HER! SHE CAN'T DO THAT TO ME AND GET AWAY WITH IT!



AND SO THE STRANGE CONCOCTION WAS REPEATED - LAURIE WOULD SUFFER FOR MAKING A FOOL OF HIM - SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHO SHE WAS DEALING WITH --

TEASING ME LIKE THAT - SO I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR HER - WELL WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT --



IF I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR HER THEN NEITHER IS ANYONE ELSE - I CAN'T LET HER GET AWAY WITH IT ANYMORE --



AND THE NEXT NIGHT --

BUT YOU LOVE ME, LAURIE -- YOU'RE TALKING LIKE A FOOL, JOHNNY - WE'RE SO WHY CAN'T WE GET MARRIED -- TOO YOUNG TO THINK OF GETTING MARRIED -- AND IF YOU DON'T STOP THAT KIND OF TALK I'M LEAVING --

LAURIE WAS AS GOOD AS HER WORD - FOR SHE STARTED TO LEAVE - BUT JOHNNY COULDN'T LET THAT HAPPEN -- HE HAD TO STOP HER -- SHE COULDN'T WALK OUT ON HIM - HE LOVED HER SO --

WELL I AM STOP IT
NO - YOU CAN'T LEAVE -- I
STOP IT
JOHNNY!
YOU'RE HURTING
ME - LET
ME GO!

AND THEN IT WAS TOO LATE TO STOP -- EVEN IF HE WANTED TO -- FOR SOME STRANGE POWER HAD CONTROL OF HIM - OF WHAT HE WAS DOING --

STOP IT, JOHNNY --
STOP -- JOHN - NY --
ST -- O-P-ARRSH!

I CAN'T --
I CAN'T!



THEY FOUND LAURIE DEAD-- STRANGLED-- AND ROBE LAUGHED-- FOR SHE WOULD NO LONGER BE ABLE TO TEASE HIM-- TO TAUNT HIM! AND NOW HE KNEW THE REAL POWER OF THIS ANCIENT SECRET-- A POWER THAT WAS UNCONTROLLABLE--UNSTOPABLE!

RICHIE THOUGHT IT OVER--AND WAS SURE OF HIMSELF--NOTHING COULD STOP HIM NOW-- NOTHING! AND A FEW MONTHS LATER, IN CAPITOLS OF THE GREAT POWERS ALL OVER THE WORLD STRANGE MESSAGES WERE RECEIVED! MESSAGES THAT BROUGHT LAUGHTER--WORRY!

THE CRAZY FOOL-- WHAT IS HE TRYING TO DO-- STEAL OUR THUNDER? BAH--JUST IGNORE IT!

HMM--UNDoubtedly SOME CRACK POT! BETTER CALL IN SCOTLAND YARD THOUGH--ONE CAN NEVER TELL!

HENRI--DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE MESSAGE, PARLIAMENT RECEIVED YESTERDAY?

MAIS OUI-- AS IF WE DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH TROUBLE! PROBABLY A RUSSIAN PLOT!

NEVER CAN TELL ABOUT THIS-- BETTER CALL IN THE F.B.I.!



LONDON

PARIS



WASHINGTON

BUT THE F.B.I. ALWAYS CHECKED INTO MATTERS OF THIS KIND--THEY NEVER KNEW WHAT THEY MIGHT RUN INTO! AND A SHORT TIME LATER!

RICHARD BENTON? DOES HE LIVE HERE?

YES HE DOES--WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH HIM?

AND THE AGENT TOLD RICHIE'S MOTHER WHAT HE KNEW!

WE RECEIVED THIS COMMUNIQUE THE OTHER DAY--WE'RE CHECKING INTO IT--AFTER ALL, IT ISN'T EVERY DAY THAT SOMEBODY WANTS ALL THE WORLD GOVERNMENTS TO GIVE THEIR POWER TO HIM--THAT HE WANTS TO RULE ALL OF THE EARTH!

RICHIE HAS BEEN ACTING STRANGELY LATELY--HMM--I WONDER?



NOW NOW THERE WAS NO SENSE IN TALKING-- NOW WAS THE TIME TO FIND OUT EXACTLY WHAT RICHIE WAS UP TO--

THIS IS HIS ROOM? WELL, I'M GOING TO FIND OUT WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT!

OH, DEAR--I'M SURE HE DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING BY THAT NOTE--AFTER ALL HE'S ONLY A CHILD--IT'S PROBABLY JUST A GAG--

BUT IT WASN'T A GAG--AND RICHIE HAD BEEN INSULTED AGAIN--HOW COULD THEY REFUSE HIM? DIDN'T THEY KNOW HE'D SHOW THEM--HE'D GET EVEN!

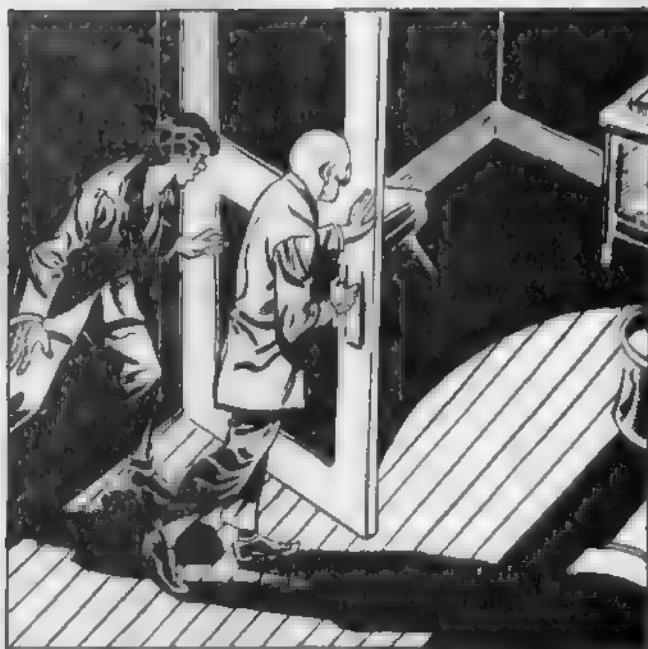


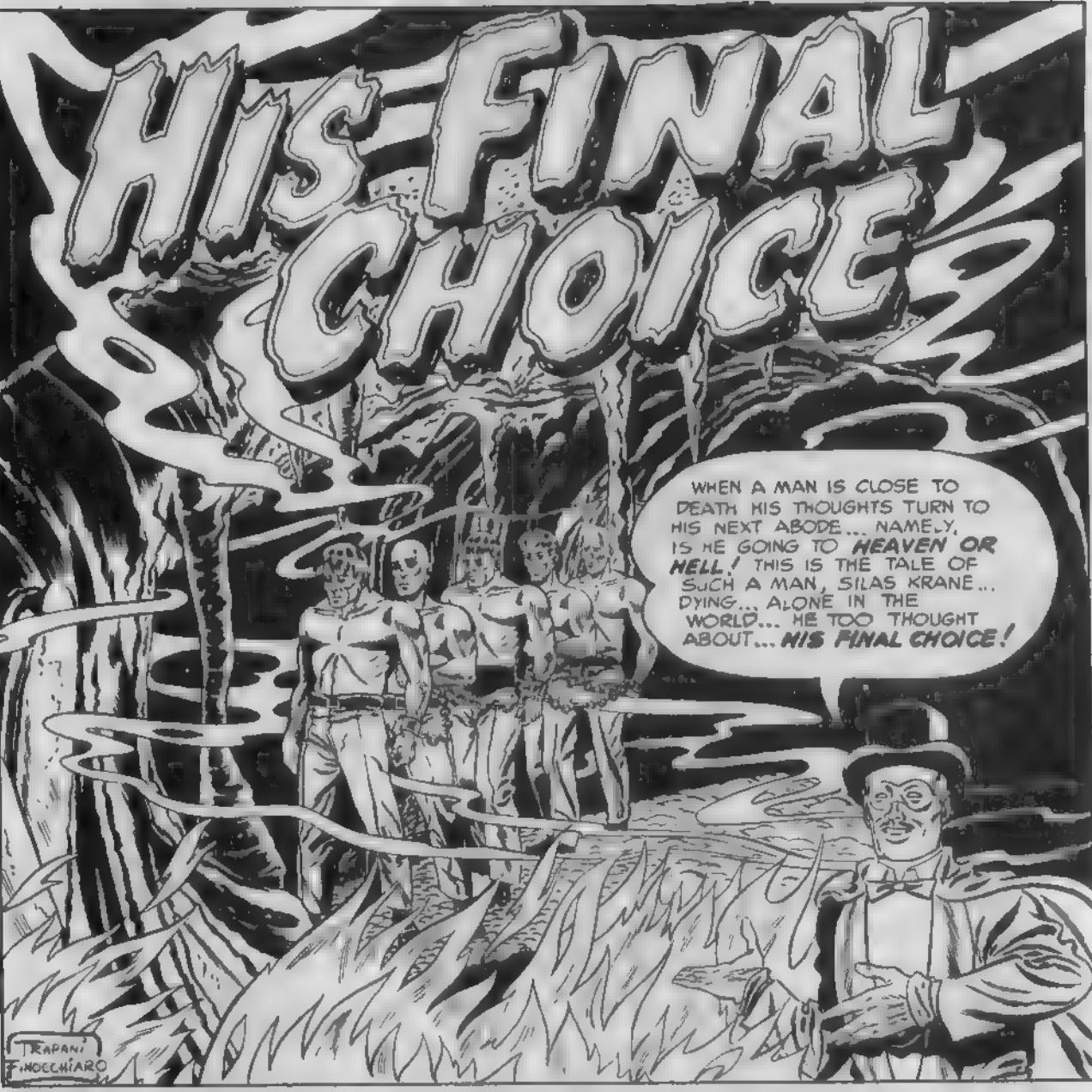
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YOU DIDN'T MAKE IT, KRANE... BUT IT ISN'T SO BAD, IS IT? ISN'T THIS WHAT YOU EXPECTED... WHAT YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD BE LIKE... BUT HOW WOULD YOU KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE DEAD!

BUT WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE? THIS IS WHERE THE GREAT DECISION IS MADE... THIS IS WHERE THEY BALANCE YOUR LIFE AND DECIDE WHAT YOU DID WITH IT! THIS IS THE BOUNDARY LINE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL!



WHAT'S THE MATTER, KRANE... AFRAID? WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO BE AFRAID OF... SURELY YOUR LIFE WAS ABOVE REPROACH... OR WAS IT?

THEY'VE MADE THEIR DECISION, KRANE... OR I SHOULD SAY YOU'VE MADE IT FOR THEM... THE WORDS AND DEEDS WERE SET DOWN BY YOU IN YOUR BOOK OF LIFE...

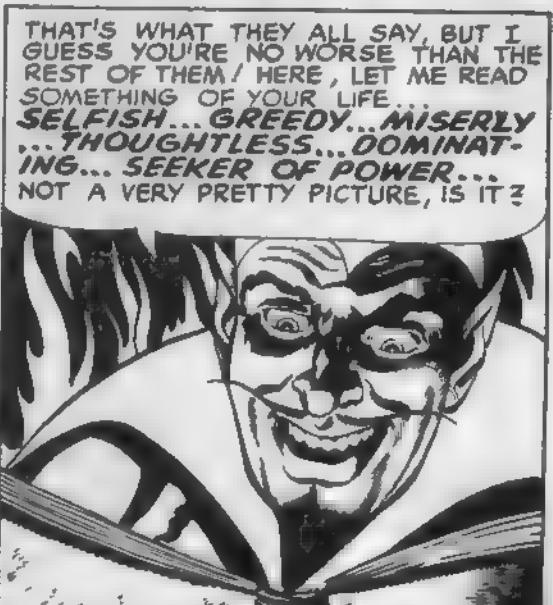
YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS, DON'T YOU? IT COULDN'T BE ANY OTHER... AND YOU CAN'T CHANGE IT NOW... YOU'RE TOO LATE! FEEL THAT HEAT... SMELL THAT SULPHUR... YOU'RE IN PURGATORY!



GREETINGS, SILAS KRANE, GREETINGS! I HAVE BEEN EXPECTING YOU!

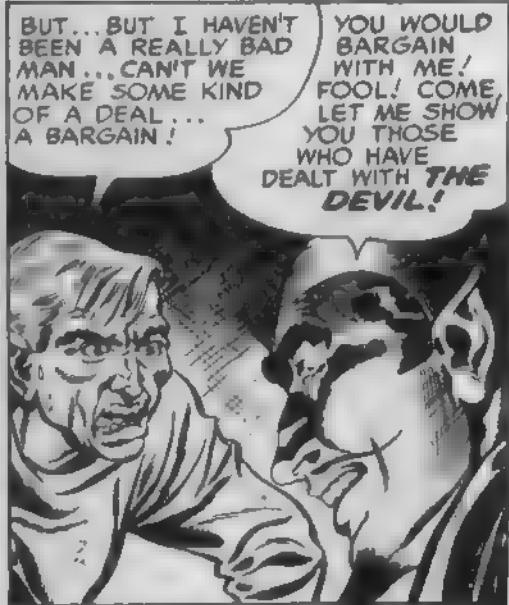
BUT... BUT I'VE BEEN A GOOD MAN! I DON'T BELONG HERE... I BELONG IN... IN HEAVEN!

THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL SAY, BUT I GUESS YOU'RE NO WORSE THAN THE REST OF THEM! HERE, LET ME READ SOMETHING OF YOUR LIFE. SELFISH... GREEDY... MISERLY... THOUGHTLESS... DOMINATING... SEEKER OF POWER... NOT A VERY PRETTY PICTURE, IS IT?



COME, SILAS... LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT YOUR PUNISHMENT WILL BE. SINCE YOU ARE LIKE THE AVERAGE SINNER, YOU HAVE YOUR CHOICE! WE ARE VERY DEMOCRATIC DOWN HERE!

THESE ARE THE MEN WHO MUST SUPPLY OUR FUEL... NOT AN EASY JOB, BUT WE HAVE WORSE!



THESE ARE THE SOULS OF THOSE WHO WOULD DEAL WITH ME... DOOMED FOREVER TO WALK THE FIRES OF PURGATORY! IS THAT WHAT YOU DESIRE?

NO... NO... ANYTHING... ANYTHING BUT THAT!



WELL, I'VE GIVEN YOU MORE TIME THAN I THOUGHT... I'VE MADE UP MY MIND... **TO THE FURNACES!**

NO! NOT THAT! I COULDN'T TAKE IT... YOU'VE GOT TO LISTEN!



THAT'S THE MATTER, SILAS, COULDN'T YOU TAKE IT? YOU'VE MADE YOUR BED, NOW LIE IN IT!

TAKE HIM AWAY!



WHAT HAPPENED? THIS ISN'T HELL... THIS IS THE NETHER-NETHER LAND IN BETWEEN... THE PLACE WHERE MAN IS BOTH DEAD AND ALIVE!



LOOK, HE'S COMING OUT OF IT!

WHAT... WHAT HAPPENED!
WHERE AM I?



YOU'RE GOING TO BE ALRIGHT, MR. KRANE! WE THOUGHT WE HAD LOST YOU THERE! BUT YOU PULLED THROUGH! FOR A WHILE WE EVEN FIGURED YOU WERE DEAD!

YOU FIGURED CORRECTLY...
I WAS!



WHAT WAS THIS ALL ABOUT? JUST MY WAY OF SAYING THAT THERE'S A LITTLE BIT OF **THE DEVIL** IN ALL OF US... NO MAN IS PERFECT, EACH IN HIS OWN WAY HAS SOME EVIL IN HIS SOUL. WE MAKE OUR OWN HELL'S AND OUR OWN HEAVENS... OUR DESTINIES ARE SHAPED BY OUR OWN HANDS. IN THE FINAL JUDGEMENT, **THIS IS YOUR LAST CHOICE...** DO WITH IT WHAT YOU WILL!



THE
END

NOW COMPLETELY OUT OF PLACE YOU LOOK NOW. UNSHAVEN, DISHEVELLED IN APPEARANCE, AS YOUR TREMBLING BODY HUNCHES OVER A MUTILATED CORPSE! NEITHER YOUR FOUL DEED NOR THE COLD DAWN-LIT GROUNDS IS MAKING YOU SHIVER, ELDON COX...INSTEAD IT'S THE NUMBING REALIZATION OF YOUR PLIGHT! YOUR LIFELONG FIGHT IS ENDING IN A TIE, AND IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF THE...

WALK OF COAHUILA



IN A FLASH YOUR MIND GOES BACK TWENTY-FIVE YEARS TO THE MIDDLE 1870'S! YOU SEE YOURSELF SULKING BACKSTAGE OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM!

CONFlict! AND IT WAS ALWAYS WITH HUGH NELSON IN THOSE DAYS! HE WAS YOUR RIVAL AND YOU ALWAYS PLAYED SECOND FIDDLE...



BOTH OF YOU GRADUATED INTO WEALTHY AND SHREWD, HARD DRIVING INDUSTRIALISTS!

A YEAR OR SO AGO, ONE NIGHT, YOU COLLAPSED INTO ONE OF YOUR PERIODIC FITS OF DISSATISFACTION



INSTEAD OF PRESENTING A PHYSICAL INSULT, YOU CONFINE YOUR CHALLENGE TO A WRITTEN SLAP IN THE FACE!"



SHORTLY YOU RECEIVE AN ACCEPTANCE, BUT WITH AN UNEXPECTED AMENDMENT...



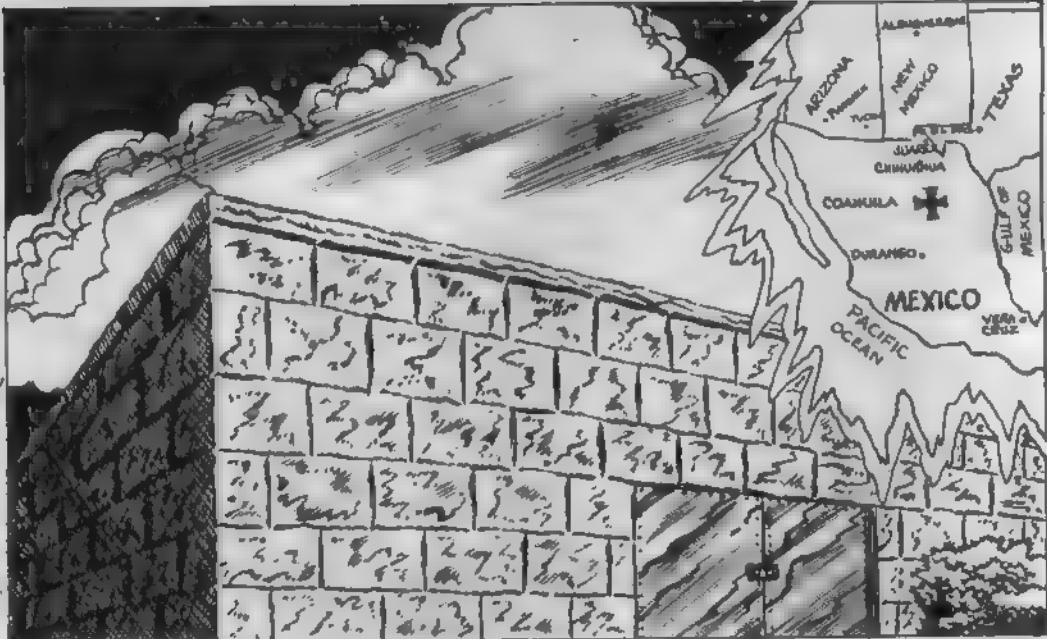
AS THE FOLLOWING YEAR DREW TO A CLOSE, SCORES OF MEXICAN PEONS BROUGHT THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HUGE SECTION SQUARE UNSCALABLE WALL NEAR COMPLETION! THE UNEDUCATED NATIVES WERE AWE STRUCK AT THE MAGNITUDE OF THEIR LABORS! THEY REFERRED TO IT SIMPLY AS "THE WALL" UNTIL ITS SIZE MAGNIFIED IT'S IMPORTANCE AND IT WAS CHRISTENED AFTER ITS SITE.

THE WALL OF COAHUILA!

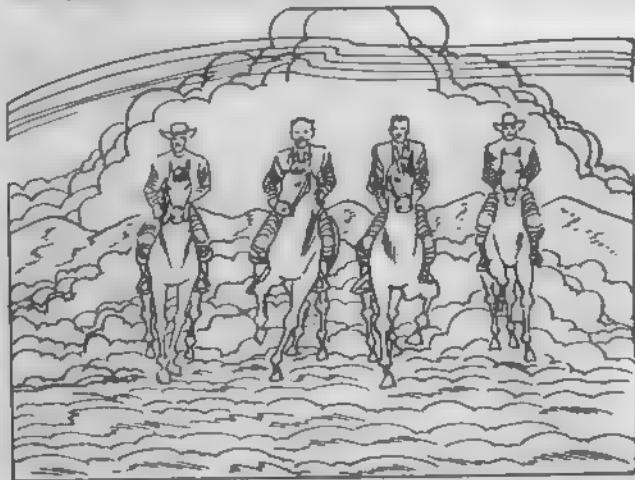
COMPLICATED INHERITANCE PAPERS WERE NEGOTIATED WITH BOTH OF YOU NAMED AS THE OTHER'S BENEFICIARY! IN THE EVENT OF ONE'S SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE, THEN CAME ONE LAST ANNOYING ERRAND.



...AS THOUGH THEY WERE COLLARS, MR. LANGFORD? WELL, WE'RE NOT PAYING YOU TO THINK!



YOU HAD SET NOON, OCT. 11, AS THE FATAL BEGINNING TIME.. AND YOU CAN SEE THE TWO OF YOU AND YOUR CHOSEN SECONDS RIDING SILENTLY FORWARD AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR! THAT WAS YESTERDAY!



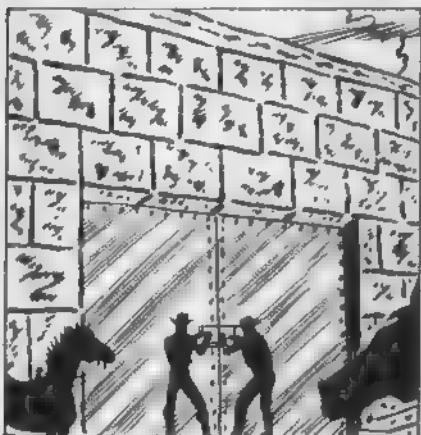
THE QUARTET ENTERED THE WALL'S ONLY GATE AT THE SOUTHWEST CORNER A FEW MINUTES BEFORE TWELVE! YOUR SECOND ESCORTED NELSON TO HIS STARTING POINT AT THE SOUTHEAST CORNER

WHILE HIS SECOND AND YOU MADE THE LONG TREK TO THE NORTHWEST CORNER

YOU WERE THEN LEFT TO SEEK EACH OTHER OUT! THE TWO ATTENDANTS MET AT THE STARTING POINT MINUTES LATER.



THE RELUCTANT HINGES SQUEELED FROM THE BURDEN OF THE CLOSING CAST IRON DOORS! THE TWO MEN EACH TURNED A KEY AND THERE WERE TWO DULL CLICKS... EACH CARRYING A HOLLOW, DEADLY ENMITY!



THE TWO PUPPETS FOLLOWED THEIR INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LETTER, LEAVING YOU TWO ALONE ALONE TO DECIDE YOUR OWN FATES!



EXCEPT FOR SECRECY, THE LAST ACTION FOR WHICH THEY WERE PAID WAS TO DISCARD THEIR KEYS INTO THE RIO BABIA!



IT WAS ABOUT THEN, ELDON COX, THAT THE SENSATION OF LONELINESS BEGAN TO CREEP INTO YOUR BONES.... AND, TRULY, YOU WERE ALONE... MUCH MORE SO THAN IF THERE WERE NO ONE ELSE NEARBY!



THEY SAY THE NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES... BUT YOU WONDERED HOW DARKNESS COULD STARE AT YOU WITH MORE EMPTY NOTHINGNESS THAN THE STILL THAT MET YOUR EVERY GLANCE!



SOON YOU REGAIN YOUR COMPOSURE!



/IT'LL BE EASY TO OUTWIT NELSON! I'LL AMBUSH HIM! SURE, SURE... I'LL JUST HIDE SOMEWHERE AND WAIT FOR HIM TO COME BY!

...BUT A SECTION IS A LOT OF LAND! YOU COULD HAVE WAITED THERE DAYS BEFORE HE MIGHT HAVE WANDERED BY! FOUR O'CLOCK CAME...



I FORGOT WE DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO FOOD OR WATER! I'LL HAVE TO HUNT HIM OUT AND GET THIS OVER QUICK!

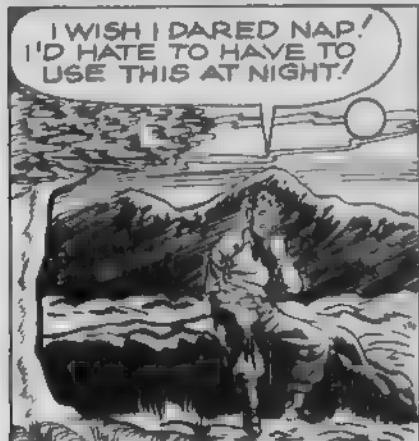
YOU BEGAN THE HUNT, RATHER BOLDLY AT FIRST... BUT SOON THE SUN BEGAN TO SET

I'LL HAVE TO BE MORE CAREFUL! HE COULD BE HIDING IN ANY ONE OF THOSE SHADOWS

THE LAST GLIMMER OF SUNLIGHT FADED AND THE MOON ROSE, IT WAS THE NIGHT OF THE NEW MOON! YOU HAD CAREFULLY PLANNED FOR THAT!



IT WAS AROUND NINE YOU BEGAN TO NOTICE THE FATIGUE IN YOUR LEGS! YOUR EXCITEMENT HAD TEMPORARILY HIDDEN THE SOFTNESS OF YOUR BODY!.. SOFTNESS THAT HAD CREST INTO THE LEISURE OF YOUR MIDDLE AGE!



OH YES... THE KNIVES! YOU CAREFULLY WITHDREW THE LONG SLENDER KNIFE FROM YOUR RIGHT SIDE! THIS KNIFE WAS SPECIALLY BALANCED FOR THROWING!



YOU RETURNED IT AND FINGERED THE OTHER! IT WAS A MUCH CRUDER KNIFE, THOUGH SHARPENED TO A RAZOR'S EDGE!



...TO CUT OFF NELSON'S HEAD! THIS WAS PRACTICALLY IMPERATIVE, FOR AROUND HIS NECK WAS WELDED THE MATE TO YOUR KEY, THE PAIR THAT WAS YOUR ONLY OUTLET FROM YOUR SELF-IMPOSED PRISON!

THAT'D BE BETTER'N LUGGING THE BODY CLEAR BACK TO THE GATE!



EVENING BECAME MORNING! THREE O'CLOCK AND QUESTIONS... THOUGHTS... DOUBTS BEGAN TORTURING YOUR MIND!



THE GRAY DAWNLIGHT BRIGHTENED AND YOUR EYELIDS GREW HEAVY, BUT THE QUESTIONS KEPT BURNING...



...UNTIL YOU COULD STAND IT NO LONGER!



YOU BURIED YOUR FACE IN YOUR HANDS AND CRIED, ELDON COX! FOR AN INSTANT YOU WISHED YOU WERE DEAD, BUT THAT'S WHAT YOU WERE FIGHTING AGAINST, WASN'T IT?



THE CRACK OF A TWIG AND YOUR HEAD POPPED UP! IT WAS NELSON! YOUR SHOUTS MUST HAVE ATTRACTED HIM, BUT HE HADN'T SEEN YOU YET!



YOU THREW QUICKLY TO CATCH YOUR OPPONENT UNAWARES BUT YOUR AIM WAS POOR.



YOU SAW HIM CAREFULLY REACHING FOR HIS BELT AND NOT SUSPECTING YOU WOULD FRANTICALLY FLING YOUR OTHER KNIFE...



HE WAS COCKY NOW... ALMOST OVER-CONFIDENT AS HE APPROACHED! YOU CROUCHED AND REMOVED A SMALL PISTOL FROM INSIDE YOUR TROUSERS LEG! YOU DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO HAVE TO USE IT, DID YOU? BUT YOU JUST COULDN'T GAMBLE ON AN UNSURE THING!



**SMALL WONDER YOUR SUB-
CONSCIOUS PLAGUED YOU WITH
DOUBTS WHETHER OR NOT
NELSON HAD A CONCEAL-
ED WEAPON...
FOR THE DISTRUSTFUL
ARE THE MOST DISTRUST-
ING... YOU FIRED!**

**AND YOUR FOE THREW
SIMULTANEOUSLY!**



**NELSON SPUN AND FELL...HE
WAS DEAD! YOU SLUMPED
TO THE GROUND AND TUGGED
AT HIS KNIFE, WHICH HAD
CAUGHT YOU IN THE
RIGHT SIDE!**

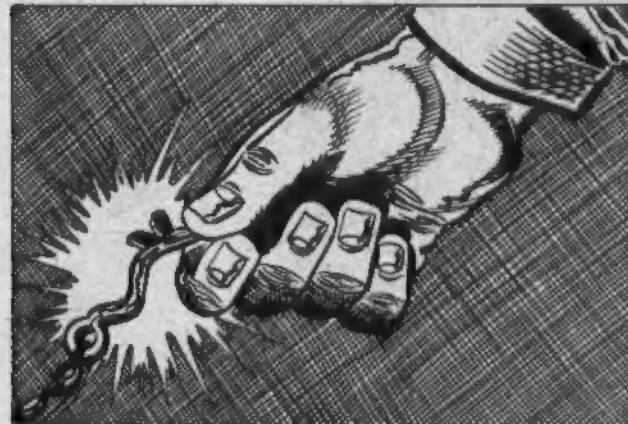


YOU SLID THE BLADE FROM YOUR WOUND
AND JUMPED HIS LIFELESS FORM TO
RELEASE YOUR PENT-UP FRENZY!
YOU SLASHED AND TORE AND STABBED
THE FLESH OF HIS STOMACH AND CHEST
UNTIL... UNTIL...

...IN A MOMENT'S FLASHBACK YOU REMEMBERED THE WHOLE SET-UP OF YOUR DUEL...THE TEDIOUS PLANS...THE IRONY OF HAVING SPENT SO MUCH! THE SIGHT BEFORE YOU HAD SPIRRED THOSE THOUGHTS...SO NOW YOU LOOK ONCE MORE...STILL UNBELIEVING!



IN THE CLIMAX OF AN UNEQUAL JOUST
THE BULLET THAT ENDED NELSON'S
LIFE HAD PASSED SENTENCE ON YOUR
OWN... FOR DANGLING FROM HIS NECK
IS EVIDENCE OF YOUR DEADLY AIM...
A TWISTED, NOW USELESS KEY!



THERE IS A FAINT SMILE ON YOUR LIPS
NOW, AS YOU PAINFULLY TRUDGE TOWARD
THE DISTANT GATE, WITH A BLOOD-SOAKED
HAND HOLDING YOUR UNATTENDED
WOUND! YOU FULLY RECOGNIZE
HUMAN WEAKNESSES, SO YOU CLING TO
YOUR LAST HOPE. THAT NELSON'S VACATED
SECOND FLOOR GOT TO TURN HIS KEY IN ONE
OF THE DOORS TWO LOCKS: THAT WOULD
MEAN, ELSON, THIS ISN'T... THE END!

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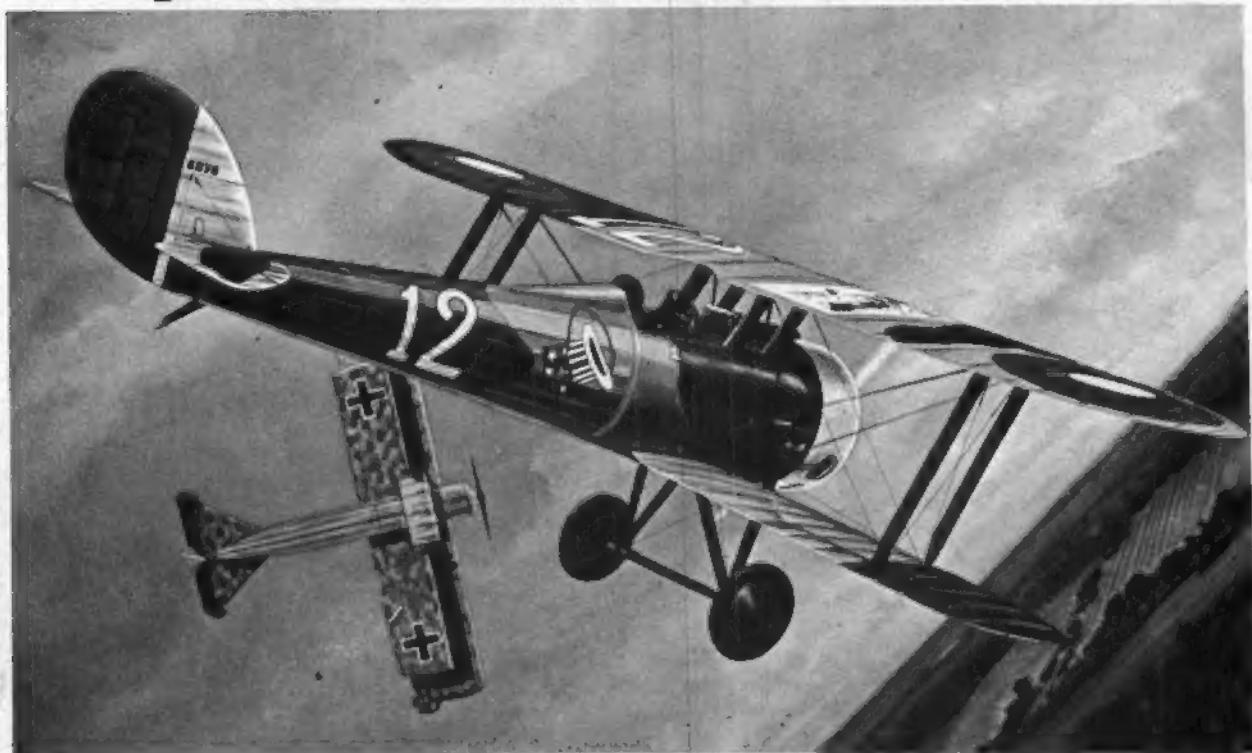
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